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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES SHARIF WALKER TO SERVE AS PARK DISTRICT BOARD MEMBER**

**CHICAGO** – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot announced today that Sharif Walker will join the Chicago Park District as part of its board. As a community advocate, Sharif specializes in building supportive environments for urban youth and families through responsible team management and executing innovative ideas and initiatives throughout Chicago. Sharif's robust experience demonstrates his dedication to public service, and his expertise will be an extraordinary addition to the Chicago Park District as a Board member.

"I'm proud to have Sharif join the Chicago Park District Board, demonstrating his ongoing dedication to our city's youth," said Mayor Lightfoot. "With more than two decades of experience in civic engagement, I'm confident Sharif will be a great addition to the board. He always leads with integrity and the utmost resilience for our communities and our families in the Park District."

Sharif currently serves as President and CEO at Bethel New Life, Inc., where he has breathed life into the 40+ year old faith-based non-profit organization through a community centered vision to promote health and wellness for individuals and families of all ages through all stages of life on Chicago's west side. Bethel is currently amid a major capital fundraising effort to create the Mildred Wiley Wellness Hub. The project will redevelop Bethel's 9-acre campus in the Austin community to increase the impact of the organization's wellness programs and initiatives.

A certified youth development practitioner, Sharif's more than two-decade career in Chicago's philanthropic sector includes various organizations. He managed multi-million-dollar budgets and led strategic partnerships at the Chicago Park District. Sharif also led teams at the nationally recognized, out-of-school time organization, After School Matters, where he provided programming to nearly 9,000 teenagers annually.



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"It's an honor to serve the city of Chicago in this manner. I was raised in the Chicago Park District. Park supervisor Jon Hobson was like a father to myself and many that grew up in Kiwanis Park," said Chicago Park District Board member Sharif Walker. "I only hope I can be to the Chicago Park District what it has been for me."

Deeply committed to civic engagement, Sharif is the former board chair of Austin Coming Together, a board member at Illinois CASA, and founded his own nonprofit organization supporting performance arts in low-income communities, Pyramid Players Productions. Since 2015, Sharif has volunteered as a Youth Advisor for Illinois State Representative LaShawn K. Ford (D-8th District), advising the office on issues impacting youth.

Furthering his vision for stronger communities, Sharif created Ground Game Consulting, an entrepreneurial venture that provides strategic guidance to organizations and individuals seeking to change socioeconomic circumstances for youth and families in their local communities. Some of his clients include the Chicago Bulls, Austin Community Action Council, Austin Childcare Providers' Network, and the Austin Town Hall Park Advisory Council.

A well-respected community leader, Sharif has received multiple awards for his work including the Ember Award from the Black United Fund of Illinois and Planting Seeds of Change Award from Taproots, Inc.

Sharif earned a bachelor's degree from Lincoln University (Missouri) and a master's in organizational leadership from Lewis University. A proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and a committed father and husband; Sharif resides in Chicago's Austin community with his wife, Natasha, and daughter, Morgan. Sharif will replace outgoing board member Tim King, who resigned last month. The Mayor's appointment of Sharif Walker is subject to approval by the City Council.

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